



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...*Staphylococcus aureus* and School Athletics

What is *Staphylococcus aureus*?

Staphylococcus aureus (Staph) is a germ that is commonly found on the skin or in the nose of many people and normally does not cause illness. When these germs enter the body through a break in the skin, they can cause mild skin infections, such as pimples, rashes, or boils. Staph can also cause serious infections, such as bloodstream infections, bone infections or pneumonia. Over the years, some Staph have become resistant to antibiotics and are called Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (see MRSA Quick Facts).

How is staph spread?

Most infections are spread by direct contact with a cut or scrape of someone who has a Staph infection or by indirect contact with an object (such as towels, clothes, bandages, or sports equipment) that is soiled with wound drainage. These germs are not carried through the air, and they are not found in dirt or mud.

Why is an athlete at risk for Staph infections?

During competition, athletes may develop abrasions or other skin trauma that can allow the entry of germs. Disease transmission can occur through direct contact in sports that involve frequent physical contact, such as football and wrestling. In sports that involve less direct contact, protective clothing may become hot and chafe the skin, resulting in abrasions, rashes, and lacerations. Athletes who share personal items or equipment that has not been cleaned put themselves and others at increased risk of getting a Staph infection.

What are the symptoms of Staph infection?

Staph skin infections normally cause a red, swollen, and painful area on the skin (boil). Other symptoms include a skin abscess, drainage of pus or other fluids from the site, fever, or warmth around the infected area.

How can an ATHLETE prevent Staph infections?

- Hand washing is the single most important behavior to prevent infectious disease. Wash hands properly and often. (see Hand Washing Quick Facts).
- Shower with soap after all practices and competitions.
- Do not share personal care items, such as towels, razors, soap, or uniforms.
- Keep cuts and abrasions covered with a clean, dry bandage until healed.
- Do not share ointments or antibiotics.
- Avoid contact with other athletes' infected wounds or contaminated items.
- Keep fingernails short.
- Use a skin moisturizer to prevent dry, cracked skin.
- Recognize wounds that are infected and immediately report to coaching staff.

How can a COACH prevent Staph infections?

- Be a good role model. Emphasize proper hand washing. Wash your hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer frequently.
- Promote good hygiene. Supervise showering with soap after all practices and competitions. Ensure availability of soap, hot water, and clean towels.
- Discourage sharing of towels, uniforms, or other personal items (razors, soap, and nail clippers).
- Establish a routine cleaning schedule for locker rooms, weight rooms, wrestling mats, and all other shared athletic equipment using either a commercial disinfectant with specific inactivation claims against Staph or a fresh (daily) 1:100 dilution of sodium hypochlorite (bleach).
- Wash towels, uniforms, and any other laundry after every use in water and laundry detergent. Dry thoroughly on the hottest recommended setting.
- Assess athletes regularly for skin infections and, if needed, advise them to seek treatment with their health care provider.
- Encourage athletes to self-report skin wounds or infections to the staff.
- Cover all wounds. If wounds cannot be covered, exclude athletes from practice and competition.
- Maintain confidentiality of athletes with infected wounds.
- School wrestling programs should review guidance from the National Federation of State High School Associations at <http://www.nfhs.org/>

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

MRSA Infections

<http://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/index.html>